

FEATURE BLADE II

DEAD &
LOVING
IT





BLADE II

"If the romantic vampire in the popular imagination is Tom Cruise in *Interview With The Vampire* then I wanted to revert to the animal," says *Blade II* director Guillermo Del Toro. "I wanted these vampires to be more like leeches. There's no erotic exchange. There's no subtext. They just want to drain you. They're not giving you the keys to eternity. They're not giving you nights in the moonlight. They're just going to suck you dry."

Del Toro is no stranger to things that go bite in the night. The Mexican director's second film *Cronos* (1993) tells the story of a parasitic device that attaches itself to an elderly antique dealer slowly turning him into a vampire. His third film, *Mimic* (1997) featured human sized cockroaches living in the New York underground. Del Toro followed these exercises in genre horror with an intimate Spanish nightmare called *The Devil's Backbone* (2001). The film was widely praised for its creepy atmosphere and confirmed Del Toro as a modern master of terror, making the kind of films David Cronenberg stopped making long ago.

So what did Del Toro hope to achieve with *Blade II*, a big-budget action franchise based on a comic book? "*Blade II* was absolutely 100% pure fun," Del Toro says. "As *The Devil's Backbone* was a chance for me to grow as an artist. *Blade II* was a chance for me to grow enormously as a craftsman. And I really made myself get a whole new set of narrative tools. My syntax in *Devil's Backbone* is very classic. But this [*Blade II*] is all about compression. I don't know how many times I watched the Eminem videos."

And it payed off, as Del Toro directs himself to new action heights. The opening scene sees Blade mow down vampires left, right and centre, dive out a build-

ing to drill two vamps on motorcycles with silver-plated bullets. It's the kind of bravura sequence that Wesley Snipes is particularly proud of. "*Blade II* had to be a comic tale full of speed and action," he told Paul Fischer. "You'll see camera moves that will blow your eyes right out of their sockets."

"I jumped on board with the idea of bringing to this movie a different set of values-visually, texturally and even in terms of tone-than the first one," Del Toro told sci-fi.com. "I wanted this to be more fun and lighter, in a way, but scary-much scarier than the first one. [I wanted] the colors and the palette to be much more comic-book, or a Japanese anime type of thing, and the camera to be a little bit more crazy than the first one in a way. And you know, when I had my interview with Wesley, we talked, and he agreed with me, and I agreed with his ideas. He said, 'I think Blade would be having fun with what he does.' I said, 'Absolutely. I love that.'"

"I think *Blade II* is a very classic exercise in Catholic modesty — in that I was not there to make Guillermo Del Toro's *Blade II*, but I was there to make *Blade II* — a kick ass movie." In that regard Del Toro manages to have his cake and eat it too. Unlike the first film, which

Tired of the living dead moping about in eternal misery? Don't believe a petite blonde can out-stake a ravenous bloodsucker? Vampire fans looking for a movie with more bite need look no further than *Blade II*.





FEARLESS VAMPIRE SLAYERS

Vamping it up. "It's simple, you kick his ass."



1. BUFFY SUMMERS - *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*

Though Kristy Swanson may have originated the role on the silver screen, Buffy belongs to Sarah Michelle Gellar. Buffy isn't your average teenager. She's a Slayer - destined to fight vampires wherever she finds them - whether she likes it or not. Vampires (and demons of all-sorts) are in plentiful supply in local Sunnydale, the picket-fence town built on top of Hellmouth, portal to another, more frightening world. Vampire slaying never looked so good.



2. PROFESSOR VAN HELSING - *Dracula*

Various played by Edward Van Sloan (*Dracula*), Peter Cushing (*Horror of Dracula*) and Anthony Hopkins (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*) Professor Van Helsing is the original indefatigable vampire hunter. It's Van Helsing who recognises the first signs of vampirism and rallies the troops to hunt down the source of the "infection". A doctor of medicine, Van Helsing proves himself a dab hand with the stake as well.



3. THE FROG BROTHERS - *The Lost Boys*

Corey Feldman and Jamison Newlander are Edward and Alan Frog, comic book clerks by day and, well... comic book clerks by night actually. But the Frog brothers know there are vampires out there and they come prepared. Their arsenal comes in handy when new-in-town Michael (Jason Patric) and Sam (Corey Haim) stumble across a nest of vampire bikers.



4. JACOB FULLER - *From Dusk Till Dawn*

Jacob Fuller (Harvey Keitel) is an ex-minister who rediscovers God amidst a pit of seething vampires in Robert Rodriguez's vamp-crime-road movie *From Dusk Till Dawn*. Scripted by Quentin Tarrantino as a showpiece for an effects house you expect some wicked vampire killing and that's just what you get. Fuller saves the day when he turns water into holy water and gives the vamps a super soaking.



5. PETER VINCENT - *Fright Night*

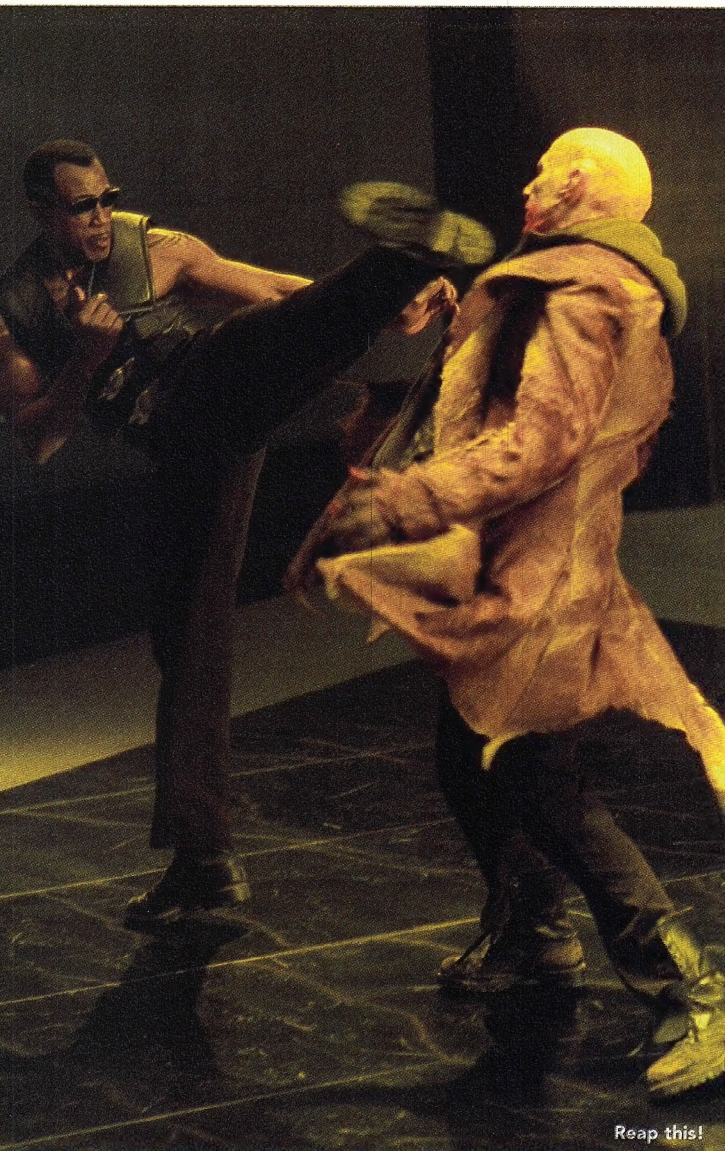
Fearless vampire killer Peter Vincent (played to the hilt by Roddy McDowall) isn't really fearless or a vampire killer till he's put on the spot in the 80s horror-comedy *Fright Night*. The down-on-his-luck ex-horror show host (named for horror thesp Peter Cushing and Vincent Price) is hired to dissuade anxious teen Charley Brewster (William Ragsdale) that his new neighbour isn't a nightcrawler. Unfortunately for Vincent, Charley's right.



everyone involved concedes wasn't scary at all, Del Toro mixes the action with his trademark frights.

Snipes and Del Toro worked hard to make each fight sequence unique. "We wanted to do something different to *The Matrix* and *Crouching Tiger* — we wanted more hard-hitting action," says Del Toro. "You see Cameron Diaz flying through the air in a movie and you know she's on a wire. *Charlie's Angels* was great but it was so satirical it was like a nail in the coffin. We went for a non-wire style of fighting." The fights incorporate everything from kung-fu to WWF moves. Or as Snipes puts it, "Blade's system of fighting is whatever works. It's 'I'ma gonna' — I'ma gonna hit you with this. I'ma gonna stab you with that."

And Blade needs all his "I'ma gonna" schtick to take out Nomak, the head reaper played by Luke Goss. The former member of UK



Reap this!

boy band Bros., unrecognisable under the make-up, prosthetics and CG, proves to be a fearsome opponent. Goss told *comics2film.com*, "Of all the other fights in the film, which are incredible, there's a fight where Nomak and Blade have a very specific type of encounter which is a lot more vicious and a lot more brutal and much more bloody and gruesome."

"The main thing about Nomak is, he's not been around a long time before he escaped. I basically said, 'his kind of fighting comes from watching and learning.' I wanted to make it much more thug-like and make it a lot more street, and then incorporate the martial aspects. So you had to undo what you just learned and make it a lot more vicious."

And vicious (when it comes to vampires) is good box office. *Blade II* surpassed the original's take and looks set to do the same on DVD. If all this comes as no surprise to Del Toro, it's not without some relief too. "You hope that people love it as much as you do. But it's not always the case, you know? I'm happy people feel about it kind of the way I feel about it, which is, it's a great ride. Usually, when [they] say a movie is fun, and you go see it, and it is not fun to watch-movies that are supposed to be quick, fun rides that last two hours and 20 minutes-you go, "Please, please, just take me out and shoot me." I'd rather make the movie as short as possible-not try to pretend that we were doing Dostoyevskian characters."

Given the success of the first two films there are already plans for a third. And, as Del Toro told *sci-fi.com*, there's a chance he might stick around. "If we agree on the take that David [Goyer] and I are proposing, yes. Which is, the vampires have won and the whole world is basically a milking factory of humans feeding vampires. It's like a concentration camp for humans. And if that is the world, I would love it, because then you can take it to a new level of nightmarish visuals that the movie will need, that the franchise will need."

Sounds terrifying.



The Original Bloodsucker:

■ DRACULA (1931)

Though Todd Browning's (*Freaks*) version of *Dracula* isn't the first (there were many silent vampire films) it remains the best. Bela Lugosi chews up the screen as the creepy count and his performance defined the character. Lugosi's Dracula is equal parts suave and carnivorous. Browning even had his cinematographer Karl Freund shine tiny lights in Lugosi's eyes to give them a sinister glimmer. "I want to suck your blood."

The Big Budget Remake:

■ BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA (1992)

Just so we know he's being faithful to the source Francis Ford Coppola called his 1992 remake *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. Does that make it *Francis Ford Coppola's Bram Stoker's Dracula*? And if he recuts it will it be *Francis Ford Coppola's Bram Stoker's Dracula Redux*? Unfortunately Coppola's fidelity to Stoker means that he's kept all the boring bits too.

Laugh at First Bite: Dracula:

■ DEAD AND LOVING IT (1995)

With film-spoofmeister Mel Brooks (*Blazing Saddles*) at the helm and veteran funny-man Leslie Nielsen in the cape, this send up of Dracula films ought to be funnier than it is.

Sticking remarkably close to Bram Stoker's novel Brooks manages a dig at most Dracula films in between all the pratfalls. Watch out for the bat guano. It's slippery!

Can't Afford the Rights:

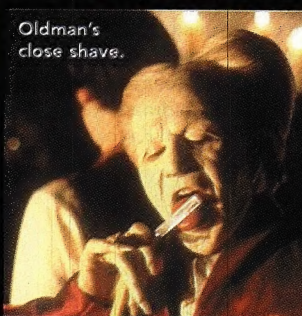
■ NOSFERATU (1922)

German filmmaker F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* is such a Dracula rip off that Stoker's widow went to court to try to have the film destroyed. Luckily she was unsuccessful. Count Orlock as he was now called, was played by Max Schreck under some truly frightening make-up. The film is a triumph of German Expressionism and was remade by German director Werner Herzog as *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979) and reworked as a true story in E. Elias Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000).

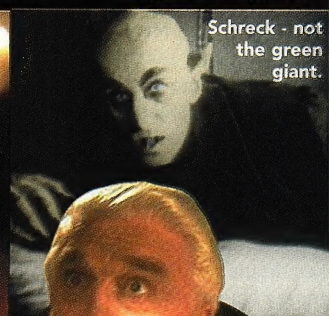
Camp Graziiness:

■ BLOOD FOR DRACULA (1973)

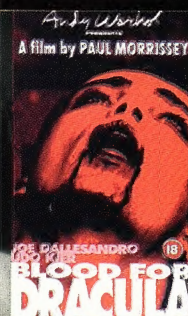
Also known as *Andy Warhol's Dracula* this film came out Warhol's Factory studio but has little to do with the infamous pop artist. Directed by Paul Morrissey, who also directed *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*, *Blood For Dracula* is an outrageously messy affair which ends with the count's bloody dismemberment. Arch Euro-villain Udo Kier camps it up as the lead vamp. A classic piece of arty 70s schlock.



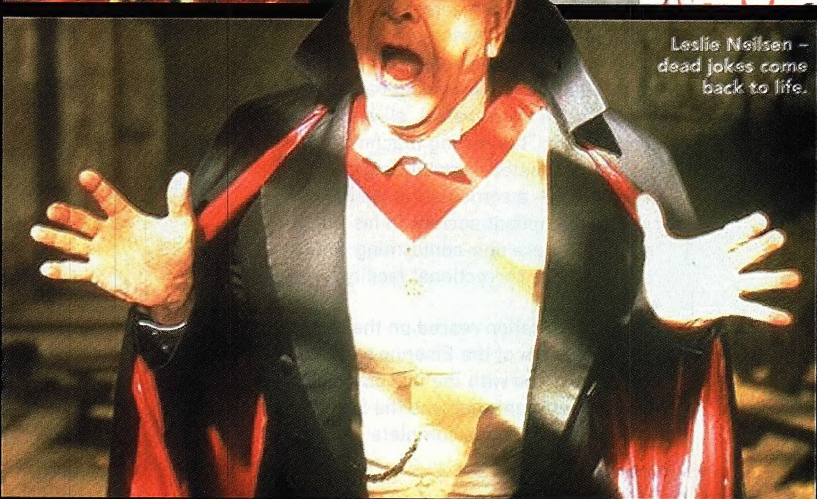
Oldman's close shave.



Schreck - not the green giant.



A film by PAUL MORRISSEY



Leslie Nielsen - dead jokes come back to life.